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ABSTRACT

A model for analyzing classroom interaction is presented. The model focuses on two issues: management of turn-taking and the relationship between ways of interacting and outcome of the teaching/learning process. Turn-taking is seen as one element of conversational style, in which speakers signal degree of involvement by using different linguistic devices. Deciding the rules for taking turns is one way the teacher can signal the kind of control he wants to exercise in the interaction. Turn-regulating cues analyzed include those that signal turn-claiming (including hand-raising and interruptions), turn-keeping (including intonation, sociocentric expressions, and shifts in speech volume and pace), and turn-yielding (including intonation and questions addressed to other speakers). Interruptions are further classified as being accepted, objected, or neglected. The connection between conversational style and ways of interacting in the classroom is then examined by comparing four aspects of conversation (turn-taking, exchanges, amount of speech, and choice of topic and coherence) in two kinds of conversation (competitive and cooperative). It is suggested that students learn from classroom interaction that: (1) they can learn what the teacher knows by carefully reproducing teacher language or book content; and (2) competitive interaction gives them a passive discourse role. (MSE)

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SOME ASPECTS OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

In this paper a short outline of a model for analyzing classroom interaction is given. A part of this model concerns the way in which turn-taking is managed. The turn-regulating cues which teacher and pupils use are presented and discussed in detail. Finally the possible consequences of participants' different conversational styles for the outcome of the learning process is discussed under two headings: competitive and cooperative interaction.

1. Introduction

In this paper I shall concentrate on two issues of the comprehensive research domain called classroom interaction.

The first issue concerns the way in which the teacher and pupils take turns at speaking. Although formal conversation in classrooms is characterized by an asymmetrical distribution of speakers' rights, real conversations display a register of different ways of practising these rights.

The second issue has to do with the possible relations between ways of interacting and the outcome of the teaching and learning process.

2. Method (materials)

Recently I have been collecting empirical data consisting of 37 audiotaped Danish lessons from 6 different classes at three different schools. I shall not be able to report the final results of this investigation. In the discussion of the turn-taking system, however, I shall use examples from the data collected to illustrate some of my points.

One of the most important and useful approaches to the analysis of classroom interaction is the model introduced and used by Sinclair and

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Coulthard (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). Like other analysts working in this specialized field of applied linguistics I have, in my own study and model for analysis, been heavily influenced by concepts and methods developed by Sinclair and Coulthard.

My aims for developing a model for analysis are different from the aims put up by Sinclair and Coulthard, however. They saw it as their most important goal to describe the different ways in which the teacher and pupils utilize classroom conversation as a means in the teaching/learning process. To that end I have developed a model for analyzing teaching/learning conversations. And I shall give a short outline of this model before I say anything about the turntaking system.

2.2. Aspects of analyzing classroom interaction

There are three aspects of classroom conversation which should be given close attention.

The first concerns the way in which context is signaled through the use of person, place and time deixis. The speaker's use of deictic terms can tell us something about the speaker's experience of relations between speakers and between speaker and what is spoken about. Furthermore, the extensive use of deictic terms puts serious constraints on listeners' cognitive processing and may cause difficulties in understanding what is being referred to. Surely this is an important factor in the learning process. Together with references to previous conversations and to the ongoing conversation (the discourse deixis) the person, time and place deixis are placed in the model under the headline "Context".

The second aspect of interest has to do with the ways in which the discourse develops. The focus is on the process of verbal interaction. How is the turntaking organized? What kind of conflicts arise and what seems to cause these procedural problems? Under the headline "Confrol Functions" I have also placed the description of speech acts and utterance functions and the quantitative distribution of amount of speech.

The third aspect of interest in the analysis of classroom conversations concerns the topic of the conversation. The meaning of the term "topic" in discourse analysis is much debated, and surely it is not easy to define.

The notion of topic, however, seems to be so important as one of the organising principles of conversations that we can hardly do without it. Time does not allow for me to take up this discussion. Instead I refer to

Brown and Yule (1983). The definitions proposed by these two authors constitute the basis of my own approach to the question.

2.3. Conversational Style

As mentioned earlier I shall concentrate on the way in which the teacher and pupils take turns at speaking. In a formal setting like the classroom the turntaking system could be expected to be controlled solely by the teacher, as the teacher has the formal power to establish rule for the interaction and demand that these rules be followed. But teachers must be sensitive to the pupils' reactions to the set of rules that they try to implement. Otherwise the intended interaction may fail totally. In real classrooms of today, at least in the classrooms I have visited, the turntaking system is in many cases a result of the participants' competing interests in taking part in the interaction. In rare cases the turntaking is established through negotiation between the teacher and pupils. Of course, it is still true that the teacher is the stronger participant in conversations, and she is also the one who, most of the time, decides what to talk about or what activity the pupils should be engaged in. But there are differences in the ways in which teachers apply the means of controlling the classroom processes. And these differences are realized through different conversational styles. The term conversational style is borrowed from the works of Deborah Tannen (1984). She states (Tannen 1984: 19):

> Conversational style, then, results from the need to serve basic human needs in interaction. Similarly the linguistic strategies that make up conversational style do not exist in a vacuum but arise in response to the strategies used by the others in the interaction.

The basic human needs in interaction which Tannen refers to are the conflicting needs of humans to be involved with other people and at the same time to maintain their individual integrity.

According to Tannen, speakers signal the degree of involvement by using different linguistic devices. In Tannen, whose is a description of informal conversations between friends, the linguistic devices are features like choice and shift of topic, pacing, narrative strategies, and expressive paralinguistics.

Although my study aims at describing formal conversations in an institutional setting, I find the notion of conversational style very useful.

The dimension, however, along which the characterizing of conversational style should be carried out cannot be the involvement-considerateness dimension of Tannen. There are too many differences in purpose of interaction, number of participants, and social relations between participants in the two types of interaction. The dimension in a study of classroom conversation is rather along the control-spontaneity line. The choice of a control-spontaneity dimension indicates that the perspective lies with the teacher. This perspective is relevant because the teacher has decisive influence on the conversational process. Deciding the rules for taking turns is one of the important means by which a teacher can signal what kind of control she wants to exercise over the conversation.

I shall now consider in detail some of the turn-regulating signals used by teacher and pupils in the turntaking system.

2.3.1. Turn-regulating cues

Following Glahn (Glahn and Holmen 1985) I shall divide the turn-regulating cues or signals into:

1. turn-claiming
2. turn-keeping
3. turn-yielding cues or signals

In classroom conversations a major group of turn-claiming cues are non-verbal signals which pupils give, by raising their hands, eg. to answer a question, to ask a question or to tell something. This turn-claiming cue may be accompanied by pupils shouting or saying "here".

Another way of trying to get the floor is by interrupting the current speaker. I classify interruptions as turn-claiming cues, whether the interrupting speaker in fact does get the floor or not. In the descriptions of such turnclaiming cues I distinguish between:

a. accepted
b. objected
c. neglected interruptions

Accepted interruptions are interruptions which pass uncommented by the other participants in the conversation, and the interrupting speaker takes the floor.

Objected interruptions are interruptions which are commented on by another participant, in most cases the teacher. Objected interruptions do nevertheless form a part of the conversation, and they are in some sense successful contributions to the interaction.

The last group of interruptions are neglected interruptions. Neglected interruptions are contributions which are not commented on or which form a part of the ongoing discourse. Neglected interruptions can be feedback utterances from pupils to what has been said by the teacher or by other pupils, or they can be utterances with no direct connection to what has been said. In the following example the teacher is interrupted twice when she is trying to explain a note to the children. The first interruption is overheard, but the second interruption makes the teacher stop her explanation and comment on the interruption. The start of her utterance is a mild reproach, but almost immediately she changes her strategy and tries to utilize the pupil's remark in a constructive way.

// marks beginning of interruption
] marks end of interruption
dec ...

(1) teacher: ↘2 first I have this note for you about the Zoo on Monday // |

first pupil: →1 may I distribute // them Karen |

teacher: ↘2 and it says nothing in particular // | but

second pupil: ↘2 I am going to the Zoo on Saturday |

teacher: (mildly scolding) →1 Morten |. →1 will you please . then you can see what is most exciting to look at out there right |
(.....)

Glahn describes the second group of turn-regulating cues in this way:

The turnkeeping cues are the linguistic and paralinguistic signals by which speakers express that they want to keep the floor.

Again I shall adapt Glahn's concept of turn-keeping cues to the description of classroom conversation. Glahn mentions the use of pause fillers like "and", "er" as turn-keeping signals. She also points to participants' movements of heads and eyes as belonging to this group of signals.

My empirical data consists of audiotaped lessons however, and I shall not be able to include this aspect in the analysis. I believe that intonation and sociocentric expressions like "you", "or something" and "what is it called" must be added to the list of turn-keeping cues as well as shifts in speech volume and pace.

My description of intonation contours rests on Thorsen's (1976) investigations of utterance intonation in Danish. Thorsen (1976) summarizes her findings this way:

> Looking at the statements and the questions as singular events, their contours may be described thus: The intonation contour i.e. Fo of the stressed syllables, describes a smooth slanting slope in statements. (.....) In intonation questions the contour seems to be almost horizontal. In the remaining questions the contours are more or less slanting slopes between these two extremes.

Following Thorsen I distinguish between three intonation contours. Intonation contour 1, which displays the most horizontal lapse, and intonation contour 3, which describes a slanting slope. In between these two contours I locate an intonation contour which is actually more of a continuum of contours than the others.

Discrimination between contour 1 and contour 2 will remain certain in many cases. What makes the discriminating between the three intonation contours attractive is that speakers seem to be oriented towards an intonation which clearly signals continuation. This must be compared to the use of intonation contrours 1 and 3, which are potentially turn-yielding signals. But I am still far from having solved the problems involved in the intonation contours.

The third group of turn-regulating signals consists of turn-yielding cues which speakers use to show that they want another speaker to take a turn in the conversation. Questions adressed to individuals or questions with no adressee are the strongest turn-yielding signals. In classrooms most of the questions are asked by the teacher, and the few questions which pupils ask often concern procedural problems like what, when and how pupils are expected to do something. Besides using questions, the teacher and pupils also use intonation to signal that they want another

participant to take the floor. Intonation contours 1 and 3 are potentially such turn-yielding signals.

3. Ways of interacting

One can characterize the conversational style of the participants. The basis for such a characterization is the analysis of the following: (1) their use of turn-regulating cues in conversation; (2) comparing these observations with utterance functions; and (3) comparing these observations with the way in which topical coherence is obtained.

I shall briefly illustrate the connection between conversational styles and ways of interacting in the classroom. Let us look at two extremely different conversational styles used by teachers.

In the course of the following presentation I will touch upon the other issue of my paper, the possible relations between ways of interacting and the outcome of the teaching and learning process. The following features seem to characterize two extremely different ways of interacting determined by teachers' different conversational styles.

Interaction	COMPETITIVE	COOPERATIVE
Turntaking	rules for turn-taking often violated / many procedural problems	rules for turntaking generally followed / few procedural problems
Exchanges	teacher directions frequent/pupil informations non frequent	teacher informations elicitations frequent pupil informations occur
Amount of speech	teacher 2/3 or more pupils 1/3 or less the pupils' contributions short and containing mainly answering moves	teacher around 1/2 pupils around 1/2 pupils' contributions are relatively long and contain both answering and opening moves

	COMPETITIVE	COOPERATIVE
Choice of topic and coherence	only teacher-introduced topics accepted as conversational topics	both teacher-and pupil-introduced topics can be conversational topics
	topical coherence is established through the teacher's agenda for the lesson	topical coherence is established through negotiation between the teacher and pupils

4. Discussion

What do the pupils learn when participating in these two types of interaction? I cannot give the final answer to this question. I can only indicate the possible direction and content of such an answer.

It is tempting to suppose that pupils participating in a competitive type of interaction learn at least two things.

First, they learn that knowledge is something that the teacher possesses and that they can obtain by carefully reproducing what the teacher has said or what can be read in books. At the same time, knowledge is represented as static, impersonal and final by the teacher. This perception of knowledge may be taken over by the pupils. This may determine not only the pupils' understanding of school subjects but also their future approach to the production and use of knowledge in education and occupation.

Secondly, the competitive type of interaction gives the pupils a passive discourse role. This means that they can only use a smaller part of their competence as speakers of a language, and furthermore that the development of their communicative competence is not being encouraged through classroom interaction. The difference between what pupils can do with words and their chance of doing it becomes too large.

A cooperative way of interacting does not have all the shortcomings of competitive interaction, but trying to cooperate in classroom conversations is not without problems. First of all, there are the problems which arise if pupils and teachers are not convinced that knowledge should be treated as dynamic/ever changing and that getting knowledge demands that learners, in one way or another, take active part in the process of understanding.

Furthermore, cooperative interaction is not easy to combine with most teachers' understanding of their roles as representatives of the school as a social institution. Teachers often feel that many parents and pupils expect a teacher behaviour which reminds very much of the described competitive type of interaction. Other ways of organizing the conversations will be seen as inadequate and bad teaching.

So when teachers try to implement a more cooperative way of interacting, they can easily be confronted with non-coperative behaviour from pupils and criticism from the pupils' parents. These problems should not, however, make teachers refrain from trying to create interaction from which learners can learn to benefit.

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